DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 084 198 SO 006 552

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TITLE	Project Pride: Probe, Research, Inquire, Discover, Evaluate. Profiles of Promise 11.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Boulder, Colo.; Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colo.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	73
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Social Science Education Consortium, 855 Broadway, Boulder, Colorado 80302 ($10.00, 1 copy of 30 issues; $20.00, 5 copies of 30 issues)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*American Studies; Curriculum Design; *Educational Innovation; Evaluation Methods; Humanities; Independent Study; *Individualized Curriculum; Individual Needs; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Secondary Education; Small Schools; *Social Studies; Student Evaluation; Student Interests; Student Responsibility; Thematic Approach; United States History
IDENTIFIERS	Profiles of Promise; Project PRIDE

ABSTRACT

A small team of social studies and English teachers in a small high school developed a unique American studies program. Activities dedicated to a better comprehension of American culture follow a humanitites approach in the use of music, literature, art, architecture, photography, history and the social sciences. Units are organized on a thematic approach with learning outcomes specified for each topic and subtopic. Although a required course which meets state requirements for American history, the students choose a learning pattern for each unit from four offered: a traditional teacher-led classroom situation, a small group independent project, an individual independent project, or a one-to-one tutorial relationship with a teacher. Multimedia resources and a special American Studies library are available. Students evaluate the program and their own progress; a narrative evaluation jointly prepared by the teacher and student has replaced teacher assigned grades. The program has been regularly and systematically evaluated and recommended improvements implemented. Questionnaires have documented positive attitude changes in parents and in students. (Relevant ERIC documents and other resources on the program conclude the profile.) (Author/KSM)

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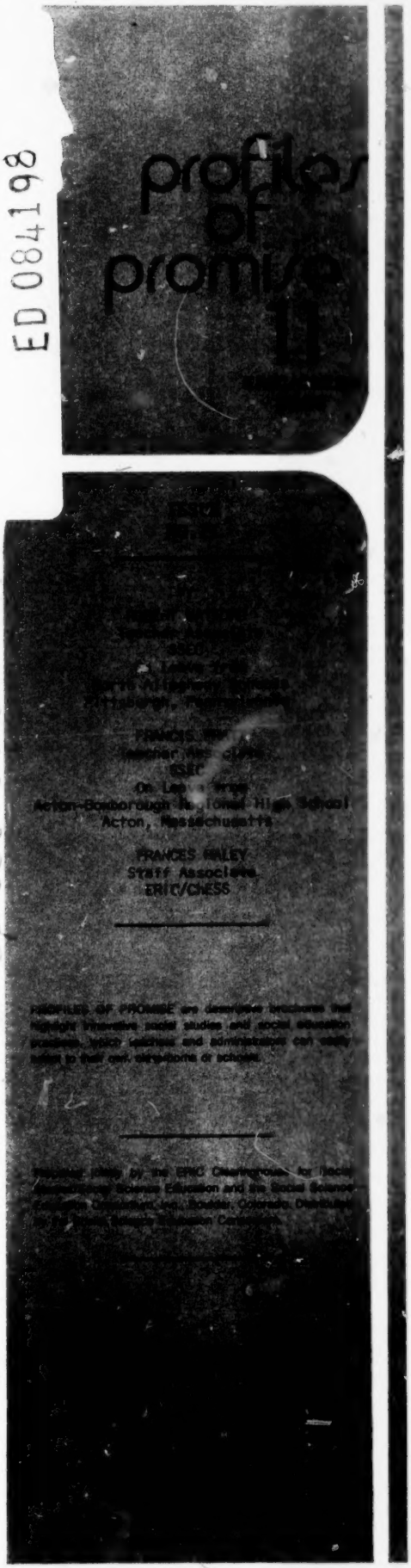

PROJECT PRIDE:

PROBE, RESEARCH, INQUIRE, DISCOVER, EVALUATE

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In a time when Americans of all ages are demanding greater control over their personal destinies, it is not surprising that concern for "alternatives" has increasingly preoccupied the minds of educators. Alternatives in education take many forms, including the establishment of free or "alternative" schools. But the most popular approach has been to increase the elective offerings available to students within a school. Semester courses, quarter courses, and mini-courses have frequently replaced the traditional year-long requirements. This pattern of course offerings has aroused the concern of educators who believe that structure and sequence are indispensable to good education. Also of concern is the need for a large staff to offer so many courses. Thus, the demand for many options presents a special challenge to smaller schools with limited faculty resources.

At Orono High School in Orono, Maine, a way has been found for a relatively small school (approximately 700 students) to provide a wide range of choices while maintaining continuity of program. Daniel Soule, Chairman of Social Studies, working with a small team of social studies and English teachers, has developed a unique American studies program called PRIDE (Probe, Research, Inquire, Discover, Evaluate). The program, which was developed with ESEA Title III funds, offers students many choices in both content and learning style. But students have learned that the freedom to choose is a mixed blessing. Choice implies decision, and decision demands responsibility. Learning to manage this responsibility may be one of the most important learning outcomes for the students involved.

A SENSE OF PURPOSE

Two fundamental goals have guided the development of Project PRIDE from the outset. The first is to involve students, faculty, staff, and community in an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the American heritage. The second is to increase individualization of the learning process by using new educational methods. The objectives of the program have been carefully spelled out at length, but can be summarized as follows:

> Our major objectives are to discover as much as possible about what Americans are and how they came to be the way they are; to discover as much as possible about the workings of those forces which continually affect the lives of each of us, for instance laws, politics, economics, art, music, and human behavior. Also, to find out what the most effective method is for each student to learn as much as he can, not only in this program, but throughout school and his later life.

Although evaluations of the program do not demonstrate that PRIDE has yet achieved the educational utopia that these objectives represent, they do indicate that students at Orono High School are moving rapidly toward a better comprehension of American culture and a fuller realization of their own learning potential.

PROBING THE AMERICAN HERITAGE

What is an American? All activities of Project PRIDE are dedicated to finding answers to this pivotal question. Any learning experience students can engage in to develop insights about what Americans are and how they came to be that way is considered legitimate to the course. Following a humanities approach, music, literature, art, architecture, photography--and, of course, history and the social sciences--all have something to offer; and all find their place in the program.

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The traditional chronological sequence of American history has been abandoned in favor of thematic units, such as "The Land and the Law," "Search for Identity," "Growth of the Nation," "Urbanization," "Americans at War," "Protest and Dissent," "Communication," and "Education." Each unit is further divided into subtopics. For example, the unit on Search for Identity involves (1) the American identity as seen through American and European literature, (2) the identity reflected in American art and architecture, (3) the identity observed in changing political patterns, and (4) the social identity found in ethnic and racial origins.

All units and subtopics are designed to help the student conceptualize the flow of American cultural development from past to present along a specific theme that is applicable to contemporary American society. In addition to the general course objectives, learning outcomes have been specified for each topic and subtopic.

Abundant resources are available to the student for meeting these objectives, thanks especially to Title III funds. Audio-visual equipment includes motion picture and filmstrip/slide projectors, record players and tape recorders, and a video-tape camera and monitor. An array of recordings, films, slides, and tapes is on hand, as well as a large collection of posters and prints. A special library for the American studies program consists of more than 1,000 individual volumes besides the many supplementary materials provided in class quantities. Two large filing cabinets store an extensive collection of documents, monographs, and clippings, all carefully organized. The fact that the town's public library is housed in the school and doubles as a school library during the day greatly increases the availability of resources without additional cost to the town. Students are also encouraged to make liberal use of community resources. Evaluations of the program indicate that students can, and do, use all of these resources.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS

About the only thing that students enrolled in Project PRIDE don't decide is whether to take the course. The course is required of all 11th-grade students and is accepted by the Maine Department of Education as meeting the state requirement for American history. Once enrolled, however, the student will find a wide number of choices set before him. What he learns, and how he learns, will be primarily a matter of his own volition.

Within each unit of the course, the student must decide which of four learning patterns best suits his style. He may choose to work in a traditional, teacher-led classroom situation. He may decide to work on an independent project of his own design. Another alternative is to work with a small group of like-minded students on an independent project. Finally, he can work in a one-to-one tutorial relationship with a teacher. The choice is not an easy one, as many students have learned. While there has been a definite increase in independent and individualized learning, many students who at first opted for individual study found that this demanded more of them than they were prepared to handle and returned to the relative security of the group.

Each subtopic of each unit is accompanied by an array of suggestions for individual and small group work. If students find none of the suggestions appealing, they are encouraged to develop their own projects within the topical theme. Completed projects have demonstrated the students' growing ability to use a variety of media and to capitalize on community resources.

One student project resulted in a photo essay of depressed rural and urban areas. Some students have developed slide/tape presentations on such

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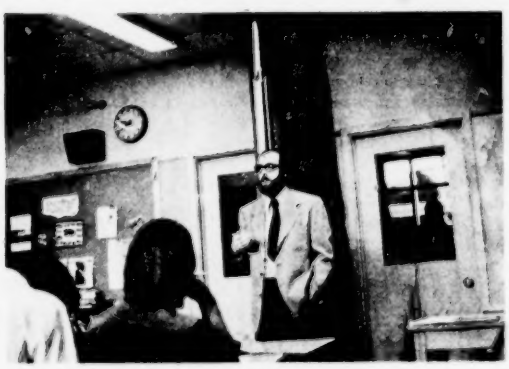
Daniel Soule, Social Studies Department Chairman, originated Project Pride.

LEARNING OPTIONS FOR STUDEN

STUDENT RESOURCES INCLUDE...



Teacher lectures

Sound filmstrip projectors

rs INCLUDE...

Independent study

Teacher-led discussion

One-to-one tutorial relationship

Special library for the American studies program

Audio tapes

themes as "protest" and "Black identity." Several have done attitudinal surveys. These surveys were conducted among students, teachers, parents, and people in the community on such issues as war, business ethics, and moral values. One group of students arranged a program in the school in which professional musicians presented a survey of the history of popular music. Still another group organized a trip to the state capital to participate in a public hearing on the issue of reducing the minimum voting age to 18. According to their purposes, students have also organized field trips to art museums, business firms, and governmental agencies.

When a student chooses to work on his own, he is immediately confronted with a number of other decisions. He must complete a questionnaire indicating his chosen topic of inquiry and his rationale for pursuing this topic. Then he must arrange a conference with a teacher to work out a plan specifying his objectives, the activities he will engage in, the potential resources he will use, and a calendar of deadlines. The media used to accomplish a chosen task is a matter of personal choice, but the students are encouraged to use a multimedia approach. The final product can be in any form--music, art, photographs, model, oral or written report, etc.--so long as it demonstrates the achievement of the stated objectives.

Another area of decision-making for the student is in evaluation of the program. Throughout the year, by both formal and informal techniques, the students' opinions are solicited about each topic and the way it is taught. Responses may be in the form of a written evaluation, a group discussion, or both. The students' evaluations are taken seriously by the staff and have been instrumental in the on-going revision of the program. Students have also been invited to participate in staff planning sessions, but so far this has not caught on.

There is one more important decision that all students must make, and this may be the most demanding of all. The traditional system of teacher assigned grades has been eliminated in favor of narrative evaluations, which parents receive after the completion of each unit. The student must make a judgment in writing on the worth of his own performance and set forth evidence supporting the judgment. He must then discuss this self-evaluation with the teacher, after which the narrative report is jointly prepared by teacher and student. For transcript purposes, numerical grades are given at the end of each semester. These grades reflect a combination of student evaluations, teacher evaluations, and achievement on formal unit tests.

THE VALUE OF EVALUATION

Project PRIDE has been in operation for three years. One of the strong points of the program is the degree to which the program has been regularly and systematically evaluated and then revised as weaknesses have been revealed. In 1972, a 65-page report summarizing the results of a variety of evaluations was compiled. Evaluations contained in the report include the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, pre- and post-test results of students of knowledge and personal development, subjective evaluations of the program by students and teachers, and reports by outside visitors and consultants. Not all of the feedback has been positive, and in some cases it was clear that course objectives were not being met. But the important thing is that, through these evaluations, the staff has identified the program's shortcomings and worked to correct them. The report concluded with a set of eleven recommendations for improvement, all of which were implemented in the current school year.

One recommendation made in the report was to reduce class size. Following this recommendation, classes have been reduced to approximately 12 students. As a results, students who were reticent or fearful of reporting to the class on their projects have opened up and become more confident. Another recommendation was to provide a tighter schedule for those students who needed more external control, and this has also been done.

Understandably, the introduction of Project PRIDE has required some adjustment for parents, as well as for students and faculty. Great care has been taken by the staff to keep parents informed about the program and to explain the non-traditional grading system. Questionnaires were submitted to parents in September and January of the 1972-73 school year. The results indicated that the parents developed a more positive attitude and greater understanding of the program between September and January. Parents particularly liked the narrative evaluations of student performance which they received at the end of each unit. They indicated that these reports were much more meaningful than the simple number and letter grades found on quarterly report cards.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The most important part of the evaluation is that measuring the effects on the target audience--the students themselves. Not all students have eagerly embraced this new approach to learning which demands so much more of them; at first, some were demonstrably hostile to the program. But comparative results of student questionnaires administered at the beginning and end of the 1971-72 school year indicated a reversal of attitudes toward American history from overwhelmingly negative to generally positive. The survey also indicated a significant shift toward preference for individual learning.

Another part of the survey listed a set of 18 possibilities under the question "What can be done to improve this program?" Only two students recommended a return to the use of a textbook, and no one checked the suggestion to drop the program. The shift of student attitudes was reflected in the comments of one student who was quoted as saying, "I hated this class before I got here.

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I didn't stop to realize until about half way through that I really liked it. Other kids from last year told me how bad it was, and I believed them". As a result of these evaluations, the school has now adopted the humanities approach for the 9th-grade program.

Besides the attitudinal changes, evaluations reveal other important learning outcomes. Students have displayed a marked increase in their ability to apply a methodology to learning and to utilize a variety of resources. They have also demonstrated an increased ability to view American society--past and present--in a multi-dimensional way.

In a general letter describing the new American studies program, Daniel Soule wrote, "We are attempting things that have been foreign to both students and teachers. We both have to work at redefining our roles in the learning process." In the process of redefining their roles, students in Project PRIDE have not only found their own personal answers to the question "What is an American?"--they have also learned a great deal about themselves.

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 056 965 - Humanities in the Classroom - MF - $.65, HC - $3.29.

ED 064 218 - Humanities Curriculum Project: Decision Points in the Humanities Curriculum Project - MF - $.65, HC - $3.29.

ED 065 391 - American Studies: Humanities Curriculum Study and Improvement Project - MF - $.65, HC - $3.29.

ED 070 685 - American Culture, Social Studies, Language Arts - MF - $.65, HC - $3.29.

READ:

Brubaker, Dale L. "The Humanities, the Social Sciences, and the Social Studies." The Social Studies, January 1972, pp. 10-14.

"History, the Humanities and the Social Studies." Clearinghouse, February 1972, pp. 359-363.

Powell, Thomas F. (ed.). Humanities and the Social Studies (NCSS Bulletin No. 44) Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1969.

Weisgerber, Robert A. Developmental Efforts in Individualized Learning. Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1971.

For more information concerning the subject of this paper,

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